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Tribe seeks feedback on natural resources plan

By Ace Stryker
The Southern Ute Drum

The Southern Ute Indian Tribe's Natural Resources Department wants to hear from more tribal members about how it could better manage natural resources on the reservation.

In October, the department mailed surveys to tribal members seeking feedback for an update of the tribe's Natural Resources Management Plan. Of the roughly 1,000 sent, 83 came back — and the Southern Ute Indian Tribal Council would like to hear from more people before proceeding, said department Director Steve Whiteman.

"I think the council wants to see more tribal members commenting," he said. "The council really wanted more of a cultural perspective as far as resource management goes."

To that end, Natural Resources will be organizing an open house-style meeting in February. Whiteman said details are yet to be finalized, but it will give tribal members an opportunity to learn about the plan and meet with different divisions, such as Forestry and Wildlife Resources.

A letter will be mailed to all tribal members with more information, Whiteman said.

A review of initial responses yielded three trends: tribal members are not aware of the full extent of resource management activity on the reservation; they want to be more involved, whether by working for the department or in an advisory role; and they want more services, such as weed control and fence improvements.

Forestry Division Head Brian Gideon said more details from the initial round of surveys will be available after review by Ecosphere Environmental Services.

Protecting a cultural legacy

By Jeremy Wade Shockley
The Southern Ute Drum

The Southern Ute Indian Tribe's bison herd started with a young bull bison named Rolling Thunder.

Produced during that first year, he was the first calf to be born on the Southern Ute Reservation. Now between 13 and 15 calves are born each year.

Since acquiring its first group of bison in 1984 from Colorado National Monument Park, the tribe has moved steadily toward more use-orientated management of the herd.

Today the herd is 38 strong and resides on tribal land southeast of Ignacio. Under the direction of the tribe's Wildlife Resource Management Division, bison manager Chris Olguin cares for the herd from one season to the next.

Important purposes of the tribe's herd include providing for the membership culturally and educationally.

Bison meat is made ready for tribal members with specific requests. The program also provides meat to the Powwow Committee and gourd dance societies for powwow events.

"[Our ancestors] had more of a spiritual connection [with the bison] and how that ties to Sun Dance ceremonies, primarily harvesting deer and elk for food," Southern Ute Tribal Chairman Jimmy R. Newton Jr. said.

The Southern Ute Indian Montessori Academy also uses bison, which is prepared weekly for students as part of their meal plan. The Shining Mountain Diabetes Program uses bison meat as a dietary supplement for its health benefits.

In addition, Olguin uses his



photos Jeremy Wade Shockley/SU DRUM

Chris Olguin, bison manager for the Southern Ute Wildlife Resource Management Division, reflects fondly on the history of the tribe's buffalo herd, recalling stories of Rolling Thunder, the first bull bison born on the reservation, which passed away in the spring of 1999. The tribe currently manages a small population of adult bison numbering in the 30s. The herd resides southeast of Ignacio on tribal land.

position to educate, giving school presentations on the cultural significance of bison in Native American culture. Often, he brings students out to visit the herd.

In the herd, bison are tagged and cared for with all the opportunities afforded to prize livestock, Olguin said. Much of their needs are funded through grants, from early vaccinations to processing the animals for consumption once they reach maturity.

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Ignacio's future road map completed



By Ace Stryker
The Southern Ute Drum

After six years of planning, the designers of the Ignacio Area Corridor Access Plan met on Wednesday, Jan. 25 in the Southern Ute Tribal Council Chambers to celebrate the final product.

The plan, which proposes traffic improvements based on current trends and a 20-year forecast, is notable for being a joint effort among four governments: the Southern Ute Indian Tribe, the Town of Ignacio, La Plata County, and the State of Colorado's Department of Transportation.

"This is a historic moment for the Southern Ute Tribe, knowing that we can collaborate in a government-to-government relationship," Newton said. "We can live together, work together in harmony to achieve our goals. ... That's priceless."

Newton called such relationships rare in both Indian Country and the United States.

The plan covers an area from the Sky Ute Casino Resort on the north to the State Highway 172/County Road 318 intersection on the south, and to just beyond the State Highway 151/Buck Highway intersection on the east. It calls for a variety of improvements, including divided parkways and a traffic light at the 172/151 intersection.

Southern Ute Vice Chairman J. Michael Olguin said the corridor would provide access for the future development of Ignacio.

"When we look at Ignacio, Colorado, it's a small town, a rural town," he said. "We're going to see future development hopefully for this community."

Rodney Class-Erickson, director of the Southern Ute Tribal Planning Department, said once all four entities signed a memorandum of understanding in May 2010, the project moved briskly.

"We met with numerous, numerous stakeholders," he said, citing a series of public meetings that took



photo Jeremy Wade Shockley/SU DRUM

Representatives of the four governments involved in the Ignacio Area Corridor Access Plan mark the plan's completion with a ceremonial signing on Wednesday, Jan. 25: Commissioner Bobby Anthony Lieb Jr. of the La Plata County Board of County Commissioners, Chairman Jimmy R. Newton Jr. of the Southern Ute Indian Tribe, Mayor Cecilia Robbins of the Town of Ignacio, and Chief Engineer Tim Harris of the Colorado Department of Transportation.

place over the past 16 months.

Class-Erickson said it's important to note that approval of the plan does not mean any funds have been committed to carry out its provisions; it does, however, ease the prospect of securing future funding.

Ignacio Mayor Cecilia Robbins called the landmark a "great thing" that will benefit the town

for generations to come.

"This directly affects our children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren," she said. "I can't even count the number of meetings I've been to. ... It's been a long time coming."

"The greatest thing here is the working relationships," Council Lady Pathimi GoodTracks said. Tim Harris, chief engineer for

CDOT, said it's rare that four different government entities can collaborate well on such a project.

"We really are excited about this," he said. "This is the first time that CDOT was not the lead on a project of this nature."

For more information on the provisions of the IACAP, visit the Tribal Planning website at www.southern-ute.nsn.us/planning.